



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Template Version 2.09

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 1/21/2009

GAIN Report Number: GM9001

Germany

Agricultural Situation

German and EU Consumers Misinterpret Traffic Light Labeling

2009

Approved by:

Bobby Richey, Jr.
U.S. Embassy

Prepared by:

Dietmar Achilles

Report Highlights:

A Pan-European consumer study reveals that color-coded nutrition labeling schemes (also known as traffic light schemes) have the tendency to be misleading. Particularly red signals are often misunderstood as "Avoid eating the product". The German food processing industry strongly opposes color coded labeling schemes.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Annual Report
Berlin [GM1]
[GM]

European Nutrition labeling – EUFIC Study

Summary: According to a recently released EUFIC study (The European Food Information Council), only about 18 percent of European consumers check processed foods for nutrition information. Color coded nutrition information schemes such as the British scheme of traffic lights carry the potential of misinterpretation. The German Food Industry Association interprets the result of this study as a signal against the introduction of additional compulsory food labeling requirements.

Background: In December 2008, EUFIC released the results of a Pan-European consumer study 'Pan-European Consumer Research on In-store Behaviour, Understanding and Use of Nutrition Information on Food Labels, and Nutrition Knowledge'. It was carried out by Klaus Grunert of the University of Aarhus, Denmark. The study was presented and discussed at the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. It surveyed some 17,300 consumers in six European countries, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Sweden and the UK both in supermarkets and at home.

The study revealed that consumers in those European countries surveyed are fairly well informed about labeling schemes such as the Guideline Daily Amounts, which is widely recognized and understood by the shoppers. Tests revealed that at least half of the participants were able to correctly interpret the nutrition table information. Another important finding is that people spent substantially more time on selecting a product compared to a previous study. Consumers were more likely to look for nutrition information when health and nutrition was their primary reason for choosing a particular product. Convenience played a major role when choosing a ready-to-eat meal. However, taste was the most important deciding factor across all product categories.

Calory information is the most important information sought for by shoppers in most markets. UK consumers looked for fat content before calories. Calories, fat and sugar were among the top three categories of interest in most countries. Salt was in the top 5 only in Germany and the UK. Older people make more use of nutrient labels than younger people.

Another important observation of the study was that color-coded schemes provide a high level of awareness but are open to misinterpretation. Consumers tend to exaggerate the light signals interpreting the red light as message to avoid eating the product.

The German food processing industry hopes that this study will end the discussion of the traffic light labeling scheme or other additional compulsory nutrition labeling requirements. The rapporteur for food safety of the European Parliament is also quoted as opposing a color-coded system. The entire study can be viewed at <http://www.eufic.org/article/en/rid/food-labels-media-pack/>

Post will continue reporting on the progress of the discussion on nutrition and other food labeling schemes.

Other related GAIN reports		
E48145	EU- 27, FAIRS Report, EU Parliament Draft Report on Food labeling	12/17/2008
E49004	EU- 27, Agricultural Situation, EU Weekly Roundup and Policy Update	01/06/2009